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Mr. Michael Levitt

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• (1305)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): Colleagues, welcome to the 105th meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. Today is our last of three meetings on the human rights situation in Turkey.

As we conclude our meetings, I want to repeat some just released numbers on this issue from Amnesty International. Over 100,000 people have faced criminal proceedings. Over 50,000 people are in prison awaiting trial. Over 180 media outlets have been closed. Over 120 journalists and media workers have been detained. Over 1,300 NGOs have been closed, and over 265 academics have been prosecuted for appealing for peace, which I'm sure we will hear about today.

We have two witnesses today. By video conference from Washington, we have Aykan Erdemir, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and from Memorial University in St. John's, Professor Mehmet Efe Caman.

Dr. Erdemir, you may begin with your opening remarks, and then we'll move to Dr. Caman before proceeding to questions by members.

Thank you very much for appearing today.

Dr. Aykan Erdemir (Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies): Thank you, Chair Levitt, Vice-Chairs Sweet and Harcastle, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

On behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, I thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you today the human rights situation in Turkey. In my testimony, I will focus mainly on the state of freedom of religion or belief in Turkey, and specifically the situation of religious minorities.

Under the 15-year rule of the Justice and Development Party, the Turkish government has had a mixed record on freedom of religion or belief. These freedoms have shown slight improvement in some areas, while they have deteriorated in many others.

The government's positive gestures include restitution of properties expropriated from religious minority communities, state funding for the restoration of a number of churches and synagogues, the provision of dual citizenship to Orthodox archbishops, Turkey's

observer status in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, participation of Turkish officials at the International Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies, removal of religious affiliation data from official identity cards, and the lifting of the ban on the hijab in the Turkish civil service.

There has, however, been an alarming lack of respect for fundamental rights and freedoms since the abortive coup of July 2016 and the ensuing state of emergency, which the government recently extended for the seventh time.

Although Turkey's religious minorities were quick to demonstrate their loyalty in the immediate aftermath of the failed coup attempt, they still became victims of a wave of hatred and violence for their supposed complicity in the coup.

Three weeks after the coup attempt, in a demonstration of solidarity, Turkey's Jewish and Christian religious leaders joined the government's anti-coup demonstration in Istanbul. Three of the officials who spoke at the rally, however, in denouncing the coup plotters, insulted religious minorities by tarring the plotters as "seeds of Byzantium", "crusaders", and as a "flock of infidels".

There has been an alarming trend among pro-government media to connect the coup plot to religious minorities. A pro-government journalist insisted two days after the abortive coup that Fethullah Gülen, a U.S.-based Sunni cleric who is widely considered by the Turkish public to be the coup's mastermind, has a Jewish mother and an Armenian father, and is a member of the Catholic clerical hierarchy. Another pro-government daily even published a fabricated Vatican passport to show that Gülen was a Catholic cardinal. The ecumenical patriarch of the Orthodox Church was slandered for plotting the coup with the CIA, while another pro-government columnist claimed that the plotters may be hiding in churches. Unsurprisingly, it was not long before incitement led to physical attacks against religious minorities.

Churches in Malatya and Trabzon, the scenes of lethal attacks against Christians a decade ago, were the first to be targeted. Later, an Armenian high school in Istanbul was vandalized. An Alevi worship hall there and homes in Malatya were next and Christian tourists were harassed in Gaziantep.

Attacks against religious minorities have remained at the elevated level reached shortly after the failed coup. On March 6 this year, a lone gunman fired a shot through the window of the Saint Maria Catholic Church in Trabzon. This is the fifth confirmed attack against the church since the assassination of its priest, Andrea Santoro, in 2006.

Meanwhile, Turkey's culture of impunity continues to make Christians an attractive target for hate crimes. A month and a half after the coup attempt, Turkey granted an early release to Father Santoro's murderer. The killer, who refused in court to express remorse for his crime and even made a short-lived escape from prison in 2012, managed to walk free after serving only 10 years of his 18-year sentence. In a 2011 letter to a relative he had bragged that he was treated like a king in prison, and he even vowed to kill the Pope. He added that he wanted to become even more famous than Mehmet Ali Ağca, the Turkish assailant who shot and critically wounded Pope John Paul II in 1981 only to walk free from a Turkish prison in 2010.

Besides failing to tackle Turkey's culture of impunity, the Turkish government is also responsible for its ongoing crackdown on religious minorities. On October 8, 2016, authorities banned the Protestant church in Antioch, an ancient cradle of Christianity, for conducting Bible study "without a permit". Soon afterwards, two officials of Turkey's Association of Protestant Churches reported the police had questioned them about their pastoral work. On October 17, 2016, airport officials denied entry to an American Protestant who headed the Ankara Refugee Ministry by saying that he was a national security threat. In November 2016, authorities handed control of the Syriac Church in the city of Sanliurfa, to a nearby university's faculty of Islamic theology.

It is also alarming to see that Turkey's state-run media outlets are active in smearing and scapegoating religious minorities, using state funds for incitement, particularly against Jews and Christians. For example, *The Last Emperor* or *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, an historical series funded and broadcast by Turkey's state-run Turkish radio-television, TRT, is a blatantly anti-Semitic and anti-Christian drama. Each episode of *The Last Emperor* has led to an upsurge in hate speech and incitement online. One Twitter user, after watching this state-funded drama, vowed to turn the territory between the Euphrates and Nile rivers into Jewish graveyards. Another Twitter user, after watching the drama, said, "The more I watch 'The Last Emperor,' the more my enmity to Jews increases—you infidels, you filthy creatures."

Turkey's state-run media outlets demonstrated a similar attitude during the July 2017 attack against the Neve Shalom Synagogue in Istanbul. Turkey's official Anadolu news agency and its state-run television network, TRT, used photos of the Istanbul synagogue attack to promote the next day's anti-Israel protests. Turkey's Jewish community reacted by stating that the government media's coverage amounted to "making Turkish Jews" a target. Both state-run outlets later deleted the incendiary tweets and removed the photo from their reports.

One case that best illustrates the smearing and scapegoating of religious minorities in Turkey is that of the U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson. On April 16 of this year, Pastor Brunson, a Presbyterian minister from North Carolina, who had been unjustly detained in a

Turkish prison for 18 months, finally got to defend himself in court. His trial ended in a continuation until May 7, and he was sent back to prison to face up to seven years of pretrial detention under Turkey's draconian state of emergency. For over 20 years before his sudden arrest, Pastor Brunson has preached peacefully in Turkey's third largest city, Izmir. Following the attempted coup in 2016, Turkish authorities initially charged Pastor Brunson with membership in an armed terrorist organization. Later they added charges of espionage and attempting to overthrow the government, although there is no evidence to support any of these accusations. Pastor Brunson's attorneys finally received the indictment last month, but only after it had been leaked to the media. The 62-page indictment is a muddled collection of conspiracy theories based largely on ludicrous accusations from three secret witnesses. Turkey's pro-government media has been shameless in its smear campaign against Pastor Brunson. The media claimed that the pastor would have become the next director of the CIA had he been successful in helping to coordinate the attempted coup against Erdogan. When there was a bomb attack against wardens of the maximum security prison where Pastor Brunson was being held, a story accusing the CIA of masterminding the attack ran under the headline, "The Pastor's Bomb".

With all this in mind, the following are a number of policy recommendations for Canada to use to target Erdogan regime's human rights abuses. The travel advice and advisories of the Government of Canada could spell out more clearly the alarming rise in the targeting of foreign nationals, religious minorities, and members of the clergy that could result in long pretrial detention without due process and attorney-client privilege.

Canadian lawmakers could organize fact-finding missions to Turkey to investigate and report on the state of freedom of religion or belief in Turkey, as well as engage Turkish lawmakers to encourage the strengthening of minority rights and freedom of religion or belief in Turkey.

Canadian officials should urge their Turkish counterparts in bilateral and multilateral platforms to lift the state of emergency as an enabler of grave human rights violations.

• (1310)

Canada can increase and earmark a greater portion of its international development aid to Turkey for supporting civil society organizations and projects that aim to strengthen human rights and freedom of religion or belief.

Canada can develop programs to host and/or offer refuge to Turkish minorities who are persecuted, as well as fund "scholars at risk" and "journalists at risk" programs for religious freedom advocates who have been targeted by the Turkish government for their advocacy.

The Canadian public sector can institutionalize twinning programs with their Turkish counterparts to facilitate peer-to-peer best practice sharing in the field of equal citizenship, social inclusion, anti-discrimination, and anti-hate crime policies.

Finally, the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Sergei Magnitsky Law) provides for implementing restrictive measures against foreign nationals responsible for gross violations of internationally recognized human rights, including freedom of conscience, religion, thought, and belief. Canada could consider using the legislation to impose asset freezes and travel bans on Turkish officials and their accomplices for unjust detention of, and incitement against, religious minorities.

On behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, I thank you again for inviting me to testify before this distinguished committee.

• (1315)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Erdemir.

Dr. Caman, we will now proceed to your opening remarks.

Dr. Mehmet Efe Caman (Visiting Professor, Department of Political Science, Memorial University of Newfoundland, As an Individual): Thank you, sir.

I thank the committee for inviting me here and for this opportunity.

In my testimony, I would like to focus on the changes in the Turkish political system in the aftermath of the attempted coup. Turkey has changed, because its political system has changed. The state of emergency declared after the attempted coup of July 15, 2016 remains in force. It's been extended eight times, each time for a three-month period. With the last extension, it will run until July 18, 2018.

The extensive and arbitrary course of action of the regime and the collective nature of the purge continue to deteriorate Turkey's society. There are widespread dismissals, arrests, and detentions, none of which are based on the fundamental constitutional order of the republic and its laws.

The state of emergency and the major power transfer to the presidency through emergency decrees enable President Erdogan and his Islamist authoritarian regime to act without any constitutional or legal boundaries. Principally, the separation of powers, a fundamental part of the rule of law and one of the main pillars of the Turkish constitution, doesn't exist anymore due to the regime's state of emergency. The very existence of the constitution is now just on paper. As a consequence of those destructive developments, previously existing constitutional checks and balances disappeared. The political system we are dealing with has nothing to do with the state architecture created by the Turkish constitution. We are not dealing with all of Turkey.

Particularly on the institutional level of the executive, the roles and functions of government institutions, procedures of the bureaucracy and the judiciary, and the decision-making mechanism of the state have been fundamentally altered. The key executive post of the political system of Turkey, according to the constitution, used to be the prime minister. In the new *de facto* regime, however, the president increased his power to such an extent that he has come to the top of the decision-making hierarchy. The powers of the president were further strengthened as decrees were made by the Council of Ministers under the chairmanship of President Erdogan. Erdogan was also given authority over the national intelligence

agency and the power to directly appoint rectors of public universities.

Moreover, the Turkish parliament extensively lost its capability to make laws, because of the fact that the president can pass decrees on any possible issue without approval of the parliament. In this way, Erdogan was able to bypass the parliament's power of scrutiny, get rid of the opposition, and paralyze the parliament. This is the most significant violation of the people's democratic will.

The attempted coup—what Erdogan himself calls a “gift of God”—was used by Erdogan to legitimize his seizure of power. In this way, the regime in Turkey now has obviously crossed the line into dictatorship. All of these indicate only one thing: a civilian coup.

Under the state of emergency, a total of 31 decrees were issued, all of which have the force of law. State emergency decrees made civil and political rights disappear, including freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, the ban on arbitrary detention, the right to presumption of innocence, and others. On the other hand, they enabled the creation of a police state and gave bureaucracy a wide, grey, lawless area to proceed with the extensive purge.

The decrees are not open to any judicial review. They are not even subordinated to the constitutional court. In fact, the Supreme Court has lost its entire power. The decrees affect basic civil rights under the Turkish constitution and laws as well as Turkey's international responsibilities on human rights, such as the right to a fair trial, the right to an effective legal remedy, and the right to protection of property.

According to a cabinet minister, the Turkish state has so far seized more than \$4 billion U.S. worth of properties belonging to suspected people, without a court ruling. Among them, there are private companies, universities, and schools.

The regime has appointed trustees to 99 local municipalities, all of whom are in Kurdish provinces. Elected mayors, too, were suspended without a court ruling. Also, 93 democratically elected mayors and co-mayors have been arbitrarily dismissed and arrested within the last three years, and 71 are still in prison, while 11 local administrators were sentenced to a total of 89 years of imprisonment.

• (1320)

Over 150,000 dissidents have been taken into custody since the *de facto* regime seized power. Over 78,000 dissidents have been arrested. Relatives of suspects were directly targeted by a series of measures including being taken into custody, dismissal from public administration, and confiscation or cancellation of passports or their national IDs.

These practices are major violations of the Turkish constitution and clearly contradict international standards. A set of unofficial criteria were relied upon to determine alleged links to the Gülen movement, including the attendance of a child at a certain school, the deposit of money in a certain bank, or use of the mobile texting application ByLock, which is a free smart phone application that anybody could download.

In the last two years, since the Erdogan regime's seizure of power, more than 150,000 civil servants, professors, teachers, doctors, nurses, police officers, bureaucrats, diplomatic staff members, judges, prosecutors, and many more have been dismissed through those unconstitutional and unlawful emergency decrees. Those dismissals have taken place without any court rule.

I am one of those victims, as a professor, who were arbitrarily discharged from a tenured position at a public university. I was on sabbatical at Memorial University here in Canada when I was charged in absentia through an emergency decree. Thousands of my colleagues have faced the same injustice and persecution. Among those dismissed from the education sector are teachers who are members of the left-wing teachers' union and academics who had signed the peace petition of January 2016.

I am also one of these academics who signed the Academics for Peace declaration. The people who were dismissed and who have not been arrested yet cannot work because they are blacklisted in Turkey by the regime. Due to the fact that their passports are arbitrarily cancelled, they cannot leave Turkey either. Moreover, their family members have also been blacklisted, including their minor-aged children, so that their passports are cancelled too.

While all of those anomalies happen on a daily basis, people in Turkey continue their ordinary life though official narratives of the regime are being propagated constantly around the clock. The regime controls the media in Turkey almost entirely. Following the Erdogan regime's seizure of power, around 150 media outlets were closed down and hundreds of journalists were imprisoned.

The Turkish government has already banned thousands of websites, including those of critical news outlets and social media accounts. In Turkey, even Wikipedia is banned where there have been reports of the introduction of VPNs like those in Russia and Iran.

The witch hunt in Turkey not only includes Gülenists, liberals, or leftists, but also the pro-Kurdish Opposition Peoples Democratic Party, the third-biggest party in Parliament, which has been particularly marginalized, with tens of HDP MPs being arrested, among them both co-chairs of the party. They are still under arrest. Besides that, a lot of HDP MPs have been stripped of their seats in Parliament. Additionally, an MP from the Social Democratic Party, the second-largest group in Parliament, was arrested and initially sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment.

In all of these cases, MPs were subjected to long pretrial detention before charges were presented before the court. Human rights organizations and opposition parties reported serious violations of human rights by security forces, including systematic torture and ill treatment, systematic arbitrary arrests, and systematic violations of procedural rights. Rights violations including kidnappings, physical attacks, profiling, discrimination, threats, and hate crimes have gone beyond Turkish borders.

The Erdogan regime systematically exploits the diplomatic immunity of Turkish diplomatic personnel abroad in order to extend its purge overseas. The fact is that the opponents of this regime are being systematically targeted. Turkish embassies and consulates do not serve those since they are blacklisted and classified as public

enemies. They and their family members' passports or IDs are cancelled or seized if they enter Turkish diplomatic missions. They are rejected when they try to register their newborn children, to have birth certificates issued, or to use other consular services. Moreover, the regime has kidnapped numerous Turkish citizens residing in several countries, using its officers with diplomatic immunity.

● (1325)

As a political scientist, I observe the following facts in the Turkish case: first, there is the fundamental rejection of democratic and constitutional rules of the game; second, the denial of the legitimacy of political opponents; third, the limiting of the civil liberties of opponents, including the media, systematically; and fourth, permanent state violence and institutionalized police state methods.

As a victim of this regime, I do believe that the time has come for international society, especially Turkey's allies, to take appropriate measures. Turkey is still a NATO member and a candidate for EU membership in a negotiation process. The Turkish economy is an inseparable part of the global economy. As long as ignorance and the comfortable appeasement policy remain, there will be no change in Turkey. But there must be change. There must be a way back to the constitutional order, a way to normalization and re-democratization in Turkey.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much to both of you for your testimony.

We'll go straight to questions. I know that members will have a lot of them.

We'll begin with MP Anderson, please.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you.

You mentioned, Dr. Caman, that you lost your job. I would like both of you to tell us a bit about the personal price you paid for this. If either of you went back to Turkey or tried to travel internationally, what would happen to you?

Dr. Mehmet Efe Caman: Ever since I experienced those difficulties, I have never tried to go to another country, because I know that Canada has the rule of law. My passport, although on one side has been cancelled by the Turkish government, is still internationally recognized as a travel document.

I'm fine here in Canada as long as I stay here. If I decided to go anywhere else, especially to the European Union or the United States, or any country, including a third world country, it might be a big problem for me.

Mr. David Anderson: Dr. Erdemir?

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: For my part, last November I did testify at the U.S. Senate at an event organized by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, in a very similar manner—to raise the plight of Turkey's religious minorities, especially the case of U.S. pastor Andrew Brunson. Just a couple of weeks after my testimony, the Turkish government issued an arrest warrant in Turkey on bogus charges. When I appealed that warrant, the government confiscated all of my assets in Turkey.

I'm just one example of the dissidents who have to pay a price for speaking out about vulnerable communities in Turkey. I think it's really heartening to see that Turkish citizens are not bowing to these pressures. There are still people who continue to speak out.

Mr. David Anderson: Can I go back to what you were focused on before, which was religious ideology? I'm wondering if you can explain this to us a little bit more. How much, and where, is religious ideology being used to achieve the president's goals? You talked about the restriction on religious minorities. How is he using religious ideology in an offensive capacity to try to strengthen his own position?

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: Especially since the aborted coup and then the state of emergency, we are seeing that Turkish President Erdogan is basing his legitimacy on both nationalism and radical Islam. When these two ideologies come together they're sometimes referred to as "neo-Ottomanism". It is an attempt to kind of rekindle the glories of the Ottoman empire, which was an exclusionist empire. Of course, this ideology needs its targets, its scapegoats. Unfortunately, Turkey's religious minorities, who are already going through very difficult times, end up being very convenient targets, especially Christians and Jews. But it's not only them; it's also some non-Sunni Muslim minorities like the Alevis or the Shiites. Similarly, Turkey's atheists, agnostics, and deists have recently become targets.

Basically, anyone who doesn't fit within the straitjacket of Erdogan's preferred view of the world can easily become a traitor, a fifth column, a public enemy. This is an alarming trend that we continue to observe.

• (1330)

Mr. David Anderson: A little earlier you mentioned the snap election. I'd like to ask a couple of questions about that. I'm sorry that our time is so short.

First, you've written that this election is more a result of duress than it is of good strategy. I'm wondering if you can address that for a minute. We had witnesses talk the other day about the snap election.

Second, how does the emergency order affect the campaign, and how does it then improve the chances of the president to strengthen his position?

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: Anyone who has followed President Erdogan's career since 2002 could be surprised by the snap election decision because in the past he has denounced early elections as either a sign of underdevelopment or of treason. Despite this framing of it, he had to call snap elections almost two years before the scheduled elections. Some analysts argue that this is just Erdogan's strategic vision to ambush the opposition. I see it more as a decision he had to take under duress.

When we look at the Turkish economy, we see major signs of trouble brewing: devaluation of the Turkish lira, a current account deficit, record-high inflation. I think Erdogan realized he can't wait until November 2019 for the elections, and he'd better call elections while the economy was still surviving on life support.

Mr. David Anderson: What impact does the emergency order have on that?

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: For the opposition, it will be tricky to run under the state of emergency conditions. Most public gatherings and rallies are severely restricted. Journalists are in jail. More than 90% of Turkey's print and visual media are under Erdogan's direct or indirect control. There's a huge budgetary advantage to Erdogan as he taps into the public purse.

Still, I don't want to be pessimistic. Although the playing field is not level, Turkey's opposition parties recently have demonstrated immense wisdom in coming together across the political spectrum and demonstrating that democracy is not a zero-sum game of destroying one another, but more about collaborating to develop a pluralistic democratic ecosystem.

Mr. David Anderson: A former ambassador to Canada, Dr. Babali, was arrested in August or September of 2016.

Are either of you familiar with him and do you know where he is now and what his fate is?

Dr. Mehmet Efe Caman: I know he was arrested in Turkey, but I have never heard about him.

Mr. David Anderson: I tried to find some information. It was very difficult. I wonder if either of you were aware of that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Anderson.

I'm going to start the questioning, and then I'm going to hand over the floor to MP Sgro.

Several weeks ago, six Turkish nationals were arrested and extradited from Kosovo in the middle of the night. I want to quote Prime Minister Haradinaj, the Kosovan Prime Minister: "Today we have decided to start an investigation of all (state) structures that were involved in arresting and deporting the six Turkish men." As a result of this middle-of-the-night activity, he sacked both his interior minister and his secret service chief.

The six individuals who were extradited were referred to by Erdogan as criminals and the subjects of a plot. He said it's very clear they were operating in Gülen's school in Kosovo. They were teachers.

What kind of threat are Turkish nationals facing in other countries?

Obviously in this particular situation, the Kosovan Prime Minister has taken some fairly strong action, spoken out against the activity that happened, but do you think there's a threat to Turkish nationals in other countries?

• (1335)

Dr. Mehmet Efe Caman: Absolutely, there is a concrete threat against Turkish citizens everywhere in the world. Of course the limit of this threat varies, and it differs from country to country. It depends on a country's structure around the rule of law. When it comes to Canada, the United States, or any European Union member, especially Germany, France, and other established democracies in the European Union, it's very hard to influence those governments to do illegal actions, such as those you'll see in Kosovo, Malaysia, or some African countries where officials of the Turkish state were able to kidnap people.

On the other hand, there are also some other "minor" issues that the Turkish government can cause here in Canada, the United States, or in any other rule-of-law country. For example, there are citizens located in countries like Canada who have valid permanent residency or any type of visa, and from time to time they need to go to the Turkish embassy or the general consulate to do stuff like extending their passports or registering their newborn babies to receive birth certificates. These are very simple, everyday things that happen for foreigners in a third country, and they need their embassies and consulates to do stuff so they can also provide the documents that their host country needs from time to time. In those cases, it's a very big issue for people like me or any other person who is located in Canada, the United States, or any other rule-of-law country that Turkish embassies and consulates are rejecting people. They are not doing anything. They don't serve people because some people are categorized or blacklisted.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm now going to turn the floor over to MP Sgro.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Thank you very much to both our witnesses. I'm very pleased to see you here. It's very sad to hear you talk about your beautiful country and the fact that, little by little, you're losing everything that you've had there and you can't even return. I hope that sooner than later somehow some common sense will enter into the president's regime, and that he would try to start to turn these things around rather than continue on.

Just to make sure it's on the record, I'll say that, as of March 2018, a group of anonymous Turkish journalists were able to verify that since July 2016, 151,967 individuals have been dismissed from their jobs in the public service, private sector, and civil society; 133 individuals have been detained; 64,000 have been arrested; 3,000 schools, universities, and student residences have been closed; 5,800 academics have lost their positions; 4,400 judges and prosecutors have been dismissed; 189 media outlets have been shut down; and 319 journalists have been arrested or prosecuted.

How can the country even begin to function and provide an education for children if it is dismissing and putting in jail those who staff its basic public service?

Mr. Erdemir, do you want to comment on that?

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: I think we have to tackle this problem at two different levels. On the one hand, we see that Turkey has a major human resource problem at this point, a bottleneck. At the same time, in addition to the arrests, dismissals, and blacklisting, we are

also seeing an exodus, a brain drain, such that people who are not yet necessarily harassed by the government choose to leave Turkey and look for alternatives in Europe or in the Americas. When we look at these cases, we see that this exodus is not triggered by economic factors. It's mostly about individuals and families looking for the rule of law, fundamental rights and freedoms, and freedom of religion or belief. People are simply looking for a future with guaranteed fundamental rights. In the mid- to long-run, I think this is the major challenge for Turkey, which has NATO's second largest military. A Turkey that continues to bleed its smart minds and hearts is a grave danger not only to itself but also to the transatlantic alliance.

• (1340)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: I can say that many of those individuals who are leaving are finding a home in Canada in many of our own ridings.

You mentioned a fact-finding mission or monitoring the upcoming election. Would you like to elaborate further on that?

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: Yes. Since for the most part Turkey now lacks an independent media for a robust civil society, I think it's imperative that Turkey's friends carry out fact-finding missions and report on the state of human rights in Turkey, as well as showing that they're in solidarity with Turkey's persecuted masses. For example, reports, bilateral and multilateral meetings, fact-finding missions, and any other sign of a demonstration of solidarity I think would mean so much for Turkey's dissidents, and also for encouraging other countries to do the same.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We're now going to move to MP Hardcastle, please.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for sharing with us today information that's very important.

I'd like to hear a little more about the academic community. We've heard about Academics for Peace. We've heard about the academics who were arrested after the petition call. I'd like to know about the state of academic freedom before the coup and what the active role is today for Academics for Peace.

Dr. Mehmet Efe Caman: Thank you for the question. I think it's one of the most important parts, honestly, because for many other professions, human rights violations or nondemocratic structures are not a big problem. If you are an engineer somewhere and working in a factory or a company, maybe it doesn't bother you because you're continuing with your regular life, but as an academic you need freedom of expression. You need to be a freethinker. You need to be free to express yourself, to communicate with students, to express yourself in a written way, and to communicate with your colleagues worldwide. All those things are essential.

I can share a very personal experience with you. I studied in Germany between 1991 and almost 2006. I was there for my bachelor's and master's degrees and my Ph.D. I spent 15 years in Germany and received German citizenship. I was established in Germany. My daughter came to work in Germany. I married over there. Everything happened there.

Because of the democratic future of my country and because I was idealistic, I decided to go back to Turkey in 2006 to work at the university in order to contribute to the development of my own country and to contribute to my people becoming free. That was during the accession process to the European Union, and we had a completely different picture of Turkey. It was a completely different Turkey. It was promising. It was flourishing. The new generation was open to the world, learning foreign languages and communicating. It was such a great future that I saw in 2006.

When I consider this decision with today's eyes, I can't comprehend this. I can't understand how this country has changed that much. I think there is still this ideology. There is an ultra-nationalism that has just captured my country right now. There is still hope, but this hope is not going to exist for much longer. We have to act. We have to show the regime that this is enough. The international community, the academic community, and all the other professional groups, and especially NATO, Turkey's allies, and Turkey's close friends in the European Union, have to change their perceptions and policies toward this regime.

I can understand *realpolitik*. I can understand Syrian refugees: 3.5 million Syrian refugees are located in Turkey. I can understand why the European Union and the western community are not acting as we would hope from them, but still, normative politics—ethics—should play an important role in every political decision that we make, especially in international relations. As an academic, I can say, going back to your question, that it is impossible to make science and impossible to work as a scholar under those circumstances right now in Turkey.

● (1345)

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: Can I add one point? I think what makes the crackdown on Turkish academics really egregious is the fact that it is not just a purge of academics; it is more. Cancelling their passports, pensions, and health insurance, blacklisting them so that they can no longer be gainfully employed, even in the private sector, basically amounts to a social death penalty. These people are condemned to starvation; they can't receive health services, they can't leave the country, so they're basically prisoners within the country. Some of them are in jail. Most of them are not in jail, but in a way the whole country has become a prison for them, so I think it is really important for Turkey's transatlantic allies to find ways to save these individuals who are condemned to a social death.

I want to raise the plight of one of my former students. Hüseyin Edemir, who was wrongfully accused of being a member of a terrorist cell in Turkey and jailed. Then, when he was let out, he had to swim across the Turkish-Greek border, ultimately ended up in Switzerland where he received asylum, refugee status, very quickly. He is now building back his life. He is trying to build back his academic studies. I think the case of Hussein should inspire us in the west to do the right thing, by reaching out to scholars at risk, whether they're graduate students or professors, offering them refuge,

offering them new homes, so they can begin to build the lives that the Erdogan regime destroyed single-handedly.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move to MP Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question goes to Professor Caman.

Turkey, throughout its modern history, always played an important role as a western ally. In the Cold War, it was an important bulwark against communism and its spread. In the post-Cold War order, Turkey played a really fundamental role, I think, in the 1991 Gulf War, in the maintenance of the no-fly zone in northern Iraq, and in helping that come to fruition. Certainly, the Kurds of northern Iraq prospered and were able to receive sanctuary from the attacks of Saddam Hussein. In recent years, we rave, as I think we should, about what Germany has done in receiving refugees from Syria, and what Canada has done in receiving more than 40,000 refugees from Syria. But three million Syrian refugees have gone to Turkey. I know there are questions about their future there, but to receive three million people, I think is something that needs to be underlined. Turkey has played a really fundamental role in the maintenance of international stability.

Professor Caman, can Turkey continue to play that role when its own stability is being undermined by attacks on democracy? I ask that as an MP who is quite appreciative of what Turkey has done in its modern history. I think that question needs to be asked. I think friends and allies have to ask difficult questions of fellow friends and allies, so could you go into that?

● (1350)

Dr. Mehmet Efe Caman: I think that's a very tough question. It's obvious that Turkey is a NATO partner and played significantly important role during and after the Cold War. As you mentioned, Turkey was part of the west, acting in harmony with NATO with its allies.

On the other hand, it's also true that Turkey is located in a very problematic region. Especially after the Arab Spring, the region was quite unstable. This is a big question to discuss about which policies or approaches contributed to this mess and this complexity, and the resulting problems that we face nowadays.

On the other hand, Turkey helped Syrian refugees by opening its borders, but what would happen if Turkey had closed its borders? Most probably it was a very realistic choice to open the borders. I can understand humanitarian aspects of the decision-making process in Turkey. I can understand that the Turkish government did not act only according to its own interests, but I can't ignore the fact that the Turkish government is also using the chaos and instability in Syria for its own foreign policy nowadays.

When I look at the picture and what is going on in Syria, at Turkey's foreign policy generally, Turkey as a NATO partner is buying weapons systems from Russia. It's co-operating with the Russian military in the field in Syria. The Russian military opens the airspace that it controls in Syria to Turkey, so that Turkey can attack or bomb our friend the YPG, which it considers to be a terrorist group. Yet we know that this group has never attacked Turkey. Those people have been living in this part of Syria and are not PKK members.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I hate to end this, but the time is limited.

Mr. Erdemir, do you have a view on the matter?

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: Yes. I see Turkey as really the linchpin of the transatlantic alliance in southeastern Europe. However, under Erdogan's presidency, we see Turkey increasingly pivoting away from the transatlantic values and the alliance toward Russia and Iran. The hollowing out of Turkey's institutions, the rule of law and democratic tradition, I think is compounding this problem, as Turkey is finding itself a more comfortable space among the authoritarian and crony capitalist or state capitalist regimes of the world.

The question with Turkey is not solely the rights and freedoms of Turkish citizenship, but it is also about the future safety and security of the transatlantic alliance in the Middle East.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The final question is going to go to MP Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): I hope I can squeeze in two questions. One of the witnesses mentioned that the military coup was a gift from God to Erdogan. Do you believe that it was actually contrived by him and his regime?

Dr. Mehmet Efe Caman: Sir, there is a lot of speculation about it and a lot of indicators that could create a suspicious atmosphere about what happened in the coup.

I don't want to speculate about it, because we don't have enough facts to interpret the situation. One thing is for sure: this coup, if it was a real coup, was planned really very badly. After the coup there was an asymmetric purge in the Turkish military. I can tell you that over 50% of all admirals and generals in the Turkish military were arrested after the coup attempt.

If they really participated in this coup, I think the coup would have been successful because they were controlling half of the Turkish military. The Turkish military is the second-largest military in NATO.

• (1355)

Mr. David Sweet: Fifty per cent of the leadership, the intelligentsia of the military, were arrested, although it was a very flawed coup.

Dr. Mehmet Efe Caman: Yes, sir.

Mr. David Sweet: We had a briefing the other day by an international expert who said that they felt the motivation behind

everything that's happening in regard to Erdogan was that he really wants to be the power broker as far as the Islamic world and the Middle East are concerned, and be the Sunni power broker, competing against Iran and Saudi Arabia. How much truth do you think there is in that?

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: Please go ahead.

Dr. Mehmet Efe Caman: Thank you.

Erdogan is a very pragmatic leader, but on the other hand, we have to emphasize that he has an Islamist background, so in his imagination, his perception of the world, he has an enemy-and-friend scheme according to his ideology. Erdogan is very extremist. He's actually trying to increase Islamism in Turkey, that is for sure. However, it's very hard to say whether he can also play this role in the region and globally.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Erdemir.

Dr. Aykan Erdemir: Turkish president Erdogan comes from a political tradition that's close to the Muslim Brotherhood and has often seen himself as one of the global leaders of an emerging network of Muslim Brotherhood dominated countries. However, following the collapse of the Arab Spring, Erdogan switched from being this transnational revolutionary to becoming a more limited, saving-his-own-regime type of leader.

When it comes to Iran, it's a very complex relationship. We call it a "frenemy" relationship. On the one hand, there is sectarian tension and competition between Erdogan's Sunni Islam and Iran's Shiite Islam. Nevertheless, both powers see each other as tactical allies in their challenge to what they see as a civilizational struggle against, again, what they see as a Judeo-Christian world.

Let me conclude with this: it's really unfortunate that Turkey is fuelling this type of antagonistic civilizational rhetoric, because Turkey itself is really the cradle where Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Baha'ism, and other faiths have basically flourished for centuries, if not millennia. Turkey, which should be the bridge-builder, the reconciliator, in the Middle East has become an instigator of religious intolerance and extremism under the rule of Erdogan.

Mr. David Sweet: Gentlemen, thank you very much. I know you didn't choose it, but we appreciate your sacrifice.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you both, for joining us by video conference today and for providing some riveting testimony. This brings to a conclusion our study on the human rights situation in Turkey.

Thank you to all our witnesses who have participated, as well as many of the guests who have joined us to hear the testimony over the last number of days and, of course, to the members for their thoughtful questions.

With that, we shall adjourn.





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